

Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy Supported Options Initiative: Evaluation of Phase One

Executive summary

March 2015

Introduction to the Supported Options Initiative

The Supported Options Initiative is one element of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation's Social Justice programme, delivered in partnership with Unbound Philanthropy (*the Foundations*). The first phase of the Initiative ran for two years from 2012. Its strategic goal was to '*support and encourage migrant, youth and advice organisations to better understand, respond to and reach out to young and child migrants with irregular immigration status, and capture and share learning to improve practice and policy*'. In addition, three priority outcomes were specified:

- Better advice services to young migrants through holistic approaches to their advice, support and information needs (legal and social)
- Improved provision of online information and support to young migrants
- Increased understanding of the issues facing young people leaving the UK, forcibly or voluntarily, and piloting options to better support them.

The context of the Supported Options Initiative

The focus of the Supported Options Initiative was work with 'child and young irregular migrants': children and young people up to the age of 30 in the UK, independently or with family, including those who:

- Were born in the UK to parents without regularised immigration status
- Have overstayed visas or otherwise violated visa conditions
- Have a rejected asylum claim but remain in the UK
- Cannot be removed from the UK because they are stateless
- Are '*sans papiers*'¹ (e.g. whose papers were taken or destroyed by an employer)
- Entered avoiding immigration inspection or using false documents (wittingly or unwittingly).²

The lives of young irregular migrants are filled with acute and steady hardship – whatever form that irregularity takes. The definition of the term 'irregular' has many facets, and given that this is a 'hidden' population, estimates of numbers of children with irregular migration status vary.³

¹ See Bloch, A., Sigona, N., Zetter, R. (2014) [*Sans Papiers: The Social and Economic Lives of Undocumented Migrants*](#), Pluto Press.

² From Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy, *Supported Options Fund for Young People with Irregular Immigration Status: Evaluation Brief*, 2011. See also Institute for Public Policy Research (2006) *Irregular Migration in the UK, an ippr FactFile*, the original source of these categorisations.

³ Sigona and Hughes (2012) estimate that 120,000 irregular migrants are living in the UK, of whom 60,000–65,000 were UK-born. See Sigona, N. and Hughes, V. (2012) *No Way Out, No Way In: Irregular migrant children and families in the UK*. Oxford: University of Oxford.

Research in the UK⁴ as well as in Europe⁵ indicates that there are several elements that contribute to young irregular migrants' sense of precarious living. First, in the choices that they face about their degrees of visibility, along with how they should respond to risks of exposure and subsequent threats of deportation. Second, allied to these choices, they can feel atomised, being part of social networks that are profoundly unstable. Third, in relation to organisational responses, there are severe limitations in accessing financial assistance, health care, adequate housing, educational and employment opportunities and social care for young irregular migrants. Fourth, and perhaps most powerfully, there is confusion and clamour in response to questions of whether they – as irregular migrant children – should be cared for as children or controlled as migrants, as evidenced by the conflicting laws and policies that we outline in this report.

As the losses mount up for irregular migrant children, being able to lead an ordinary life becomes extraordinarily difficult. In comparison to other vulnerable groups of citizen children, and in the absence of secure immigration status, they face destitution through a lack of entitlement to support. In their everyday lives, they struggle to secure the basics of everyday life – food, clothes, shoes, outings, transport costs and phone credits. They face a future that is uncertain, where routes to regularisation are unclear to them. They risk homelessness, the possibility of exploitation and persistent psychological pressure.

These risks are further compounded at a time when, in the UK, both generic provision for children and young people, and specialist migrant support across both the public and voluntary sectors have come under intense pressure and, in some cases, have disappeared. Generic provision for children and young people is under pressure from: public expenditure cuts to services (especially youth services); reductions in welfare spending pushing up the number of young people seeking help; and pressure from cuts and rising need on public sector housing, social services, voluntary sector advice and homelessness providers.⁶

Specialist migrant support services face all of the pressures listed above but, in addition, they have also been significantly affected by a highly volatile and hostile external environment that remains in a state of flux. Changes to laws, policies and funding⁷ have made it harder to fund legal representation and have led to a reduction in the overall number of solicitors available to take on this work, compounding well-known concerns about the quality of legal representation on immigration issues.

Overview of the Supported Options Initiative

The Initiative emerged from a development phase during which the Foundations sought to establish a thorough understanding of the complex and dynamic nature of being an irregular migrant child or young person. Specifically, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation had commissioned and published *No right to*

⁴ See Bloch, A., Sigona, N. and Zetter, R. (2014) [*Sans Papiers: The Social and Economic Lives of Young Undocumented Migrants*](#), Pluto Press.

⁵ Senovilla Hernández, D. (2013) *Unaccompanied Children Lacking Protection in Europe*. PUCAFREU Project Final Comparative Report.

⁶ See, for example, Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S. (2013) *Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest: the local and regional impact of welfare reform*, Sheffield Hallam University; or NCVO (2013) *April 2013 Welfare Reforms and what they mean for Voluntary Organisations*, London: NCVO.

⁷ The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act came into force in April 2013. For more background see, for example, Coram Children's Legal Centre (2013) *Growing up in a hostile environment: The rights of undocumented migrant children in the UK*. London: CCLC

dream, a study about the lives of undocumented migrants;⁸ they canvassed opinion across organisations working with irregular migrant children; and they approached Unbound Philanthropy about delivering the Initiative in partnership. The latter would draw upon expertise in the field, including experience in the US.

Together, the Foundations assembled a blend of grant-making, commissioning and convening around the Initiative's strategic goal. This combination of interventions enabled the Foundations to be responsive, opportunistic and flexible in the context of the uncertain and hostile environment described above; and to take an exploratory and developmental approach to the work.

- **Grant-making:** At the outset, six grants were made to voluntary sector organisations ('grantholders') to provide advice, support and information to children and young people with irregular immigration status. Three further grants were later made to support young people facing return to Afghanistan and to pursue routes to citizenship in ways uncovered through policy work, also commissioned as part of the Initiative.
- **Commissioning:** The Foundations commissioned research, policy work and training around: the potential application of social media and digital technology to this field; policy research and evidence collection to address regularisation/citizenship; and microfinance as an approach to financing the legal costs of regularisation.
- **Convening:** Throughout the Initiative, the Foundations hosted learning community meetings for all grantholders to share progress and tackle issues arising from their work. The Foundations also convened wider audiences (including grantholders) to consider alternative approaches and ideas about furthering the interests of child and young irregular migrants in line with the aims of the Initiative.

Key learning from the evaluation

We highlight below key learning from the evaluation in relation to:

- Distinctive features of direct work with child and young irregular migrants
- Outcomes of direct work with child and young irregular migrants
- Lessons for future work in this area.

Distinctive features of direct work with child and young irregular migrants

The six grantholders funded through phase one of the Initiative provided a range of services and activities, including:

- One-off information and advice delivered in multiple, local, social welfare and legal advice settings to maximise reach
- Legal advice, advocacy and representation delivered holistically, alongside wider welfare and support
- Peer support through group work, facilitated by experienced youth workers with immigration advice training and experience
- Information and awareness-raising about rights and entitlements for legal and welfare professionals.

⁸ Bloch, A., Sigona, N. and Zetter, R. (2009) *No right to dream: The social and economic lives of young undocumented migrants in Britain*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

We identified seven distinctive features of the work carried out. Taken together, these features begin to describe the conditions, attitudes and approaches required to reach and support child and irregular young migrants.

Feature 1: A combination of approaches is needed to reach young people

How to be safely visible was a dilemma facing both young people and the organisations that wanted to advise and support them. Grantholders were attuned to this issue and used a combination of four approaches in order to be flexible and responsive to different kinds of need: maintaining a stable presence in mainstream (i.e. non-immigration) settings; an enhanced word of mouth reputation resulting from the relationships of trust they built with young people and local community groups; generating referrals and being signposted by professionals as a result of the reliable relationships they built with them; and visible written materials distributed widely and discreetly.

Feature 2: Working across sector, professional and organisational boundaries is essential

Young people often find themselves falling between services that work in silos and lack awareness of their particular needs. Grantholders drew in people, groups and organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors (including health practitioners, social housing providers and social services) to help young people. Grantholders then became the ‘interface’ between a young person and the multiple organisations with which they needed to engage.

Feature 3: It takes time to build trust with young people and this needs resourcing

All the grantholders emphasised how long it can take to build trust with a young person. It also takes a considerable amount of time to build trust and credibility with professionals working in the places and spaces where young people go. The Initiative funding made it possible to incorporate this careful and patient approach into project and staff roles; organisations also benefitted from having a prominent and long-standing presence in their local community.

Feature 4: Flexible and responsive communication with young people

Young people commented on the difference between the way the Initiative projects communicated with them, as opposed to other organisations with which they had been in touch. Popular features included text messaging because it was cheap; and being able to ring a direct line or mobile and get straight through to the person they wanted to contact.

Feature 5: Practitioners who are willing and able to travel, as one way to be ‘on their side and by their side’

Grantholders said it was significant that practitioners including legal services were willing and able to travel to meet young people and families with young children at home or nearby, or in facilities where they felt comfortable such as schools and children’s centres; and to accompany them to meetings and appointments. In a minority of projects, this extended to accompanying young people to explore local facilities and amenities. This practice helped to build trust and confidence among young people who faced complex legal cases and were fearful of being detained.

Feature 6: Persistence

In the face of a client group that is sometimes disengaged from their advisers, and confronted by a system where repeated 'failure' was ingrained, the ability and willingness to persist was key. An absolutely critical feature of these grantholders was a tenacious, yet sensitive, pursuit of the facts and the law in order to understand the precise nature of each young person's rights and entitlements, and to make the best possible decisions with them about how those were pursued.

Feature 7: Taking a holistic approach

Grantholders made significant changes to their practice in order to work more holistically. For example, legal practitioners with different areas of expertise (e.g. housing, immigration, education) had begun to work on cases in pairs and teams according to the young person's needs. Addressing welfare requirements had also become a legitimate part of their work.

Outcomes of direct work with child and young irregular migrants

Our evaluation confirmed that direct work of value and importance took place with child and young irregular migrants, contributing to five key outcomes.

Outcome 1: Obtaining legal representation

Grantholders secured legal representation for their clients by finding lawyers willing to offer *pro bono* advice and representation; through legal aid; and by using Supported Options funding to cover some or all of the costs. The importance of the quality of legal representation was highlighted. A considerable amount of time was spent correcting misinformation that young people had been given about their legal rights and entitlements, and addressing their misapprehensions or fears about challenging legal decisions or poor practice.

Outcome 2: Alleviating destitution

Destitute young people presented with extremely complex legal cases; they had no money to pay transport costs for attending immigration and related meetings and interviews to address their case. Both the young people and the project workers reported that a lack of food and shelter and the attendant difficulties with keeping track of clothes and personal possessions made concentrating on their complex and worrying legal position very difficult. Grantholders provided, or found elsewhere, emergency money, food, clothing and assistance with travel costs for young people. Having found ways to tackle a young person's immediate crisis, projects then worked on legal challenges or the local policy decisions that had left a young person destitute, so that their long-term prospects could be improved.

Outcome 3: Securing emergency accommodation

Young people who were homeless or at immediate risk of becoming homeless (e.g. as a result of eviction or relationship breakdown) were found suitable emergency or supported accommodation after coming into contact with Supported Options projects. Young people already living in unsuitable or poor-quality accommodation were also assisted.

Outcome 4: Navigating barriers to education

Some of the young people that approached Supported Options projects had only discovered that they were undocumented when, at age 16, they applied for further education. The projects

supported young people to negotiate with further education colleges and advised them about their status. They also supported child and young irregular migrants to address other barriers to their education.

Outcome 5: Building social networks

Building young people's social networks was a critical feature of this Initiative. Grantholders organised social, leisure and other activities (e.g. trips and sports) for child and young irregular migrants. They also identified local facilities, amenities and activities for young people to join and where they could renew or take up personal interests (e.g. library, dance classes, a dressmaking course), as well as connecting their clients into networks of young people facing similar immigration issues.

Lessons for future work in this area

Building on the synthesis and analysis of our evaluation findings, we can highlight three lessons for future work in this area, both for the Foundations and other funders and practitioners active or interested in work with child and young irregular migrants.

Lesson 1: The importance of balancing short-term and longer-term work

It was difficult for grantholders to think about the longer term, because they were dealing with meeting urgent needs in the short or medium term, including crisis interventions around basic needs for food and shelter, and removal from immediate risk of harm. Whereas projects have been able to shelter young people, they have at times not been able to root them. And sustenance has been provided in the short, rather than longer term. In the current operating environment for work with child and young irregular migrants, this is perhaps inevitable.

Some grantholders raised concerns about the long-term impact of their work and whether or not it would bring about any sustained change in the young person's life, because many young people are 'on a cliff edge' of support which will be removed when they reach the age of 21.

Expectations around the impact of work with child and young irregular migrants needs to be realistic and proportionate to what is possible within a broader context of hostility, change and turbulence.

Lesson 2: The benefits of high engagement funding

The Foundations' approach to this Initiative has been consistent with a number of hallmarks of high engagement funding⁹, in particular: flexible grants management; funding plus; familiarity with the field; sustained support from a key individual (the Initiative Coordinator). Interviewees highlighted the tangible benefits of the multiple strands of the Initiative.

For example, the Foundations:

- Spotted and addressed critical issues as they emerged with a blend of new grants and commissioned research and policy work, including: new grants to support increased citizenship registration; and policy research into routes to regularisation

⁹ Cairns, B. and Buckley, E. (2012) *New ways of giving by UK trusts and foundations: High engagement funding*. Paper presented to the ISTR Conference, Siena, Italy.

- Supported exploration of new approaches and made timely decisions to abandon approaches that do not work.
- Introduced new and sometimes inspirational ideas through the organisation of events, invited speakers and disseminated materials online, including: training about Article 8 for non-legal practitioners; and convening stakeholders around youth movements in the U.S.
- Supported the cross-pollination of ideas and practices between the six grantholders and other elements of the Initiative.

This highlights the critical importance of flexibility and imagination when funding work that is complex and unpredictable.

Concluding remarks: progress against Initiative outcomes

Outcome One: Better advice services to young migrants through ‘holistic’ approaches to their advice, support and information needs

Much was achieved against this outcome, with young people receiving support for their wider welfare and social needs, as well as their immigration needs, delivered by people and organisations with a finely tuned grasp of what it means to have irregular immigration status. The latter percolated across all aspects of professional and organisational practice in ways that young people particularly appreciated and which were enabled by the Supported Options funding.

Outcome Two: Improved provision of online information and support to young migrants

In relation to this second outcome, the Foundations supported some experimentation and exploration of the subject, which has probably created a few ripples, where individual (migrant and technology) practitioners have learned from the experience.

Outcome Three: Increased understanding of the issues facing young people leaving the UK, forcibly or voluntarily, and piloting options for better supporting them

The Initiative has helped draw attention to the issue of ‘return’. The Foundations can be seen to have made a contribution to the migration sector by surfacing an issue that many organisations supporting child and young irregular migrants find profoundly difficult and complex.

The evaluation report and executive summary was written by Leila Baker, Ben Cairns and Ravi Kohli. It is based on work carried out by the authors together with Genevieve Brooks-Johnson, Eliza Buckley, Helen Garforth and Charlotte Hennessy.

The full report of the evaluation can be found at www.supportedoptions.org